

DelDOT and Delaware Dept. of Agriculture Urge Drivers to Be Cautious When Sharing the Road with Farm Equipment

Harvest Time Means Slow-Moving and Large Agricultural Vehicles Will Be on Delaware Roads

DOVER – DelDOT and the Department of Agriculture are urging Delaware drivers to be alert for the presence of agricultural equipment on roads and to practice safe road-sharing techniques when encountering them.

The state is the midst of harvest season and farmers are moving large tractors, trailers, trucks and other large equipment on state roads as they move between fields or to equipment staging areas.

Farm equipment operators that are on the road understand that their presence can delay your trip and will often pull off the road at the first available safe location to allow you to pass. Don't assume, however, that the farmer can move aside to let you pass wherever there is open space. Shoulders may be soft, wet, or steep, and pulling off the road could cause the farm vehicle to tip, or the shoulder or soil may not be able to support the heavy weight of the equipment.

If you encounter a wide vehicle, please yield. On rural roads, some farm equipment may be wider than the lane of travel. If you approach a piece of wide farm equipment traveling in the opposite direction on a rural road and you cannot pass safely, stop. Then consider your safest alternative: Either pull off the road, safely turn around or back up to a location that will allow the equipment to pass.

Never assume the driver of farm equipment knows you are there. Most operators of farm equipment will regularly check to see if there is traffic behind them. However, the farmer must spend most of the time looking ahead to keep the equipment safely on the road, and to watch for oncoming traffic.

Remember that farm equipment is very loud, and the farmer will probably not be able to hear your vehicle. Therefore, do not assume that the farmer knows where your vehicle is located. Before attempting to pass, be sure you have a clear line of sight down the road ahead and there is no oncoming traffic. If you are in an area where passing is allowed, use your car's horn to signal to the farmer that you are there and then pass with caution. Do not pass if you are in a designated "No Passing Zone" or within 100 feet of any intersection, railroad grade crossing, bridge, elevated structure or tunnel. Also, be watchful of vehicles behind you that may also try to pass.

Do not assume that a farm vehicle that pulls to the right side of the road is going to turn right or is letting you pass. Due to the size of some farm implements, the farmer must execute wide left-hand turns. If you are unsure, check the operator's hand signals and check the left side of the road for gates, driveways or any place a farm vehicle might turn.

While driving on rural roads, you may encounter farm equipment at any time. This equipment comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. Sometimes you will see a single vehicle, such as a tractor or combine. Other times the equipment will consist of a tractor with an implement in tow. Farm equipment is designed to be used primarily in a field and is not designed to travel at typical highway speeds. Most farm equipment is designed to travel at speeds of 15-25 miles per hour. If you're driving 55 mph and come upon a tractor that's moving 15 miles per hour, it only takes five seconds to close a gap the length of a football field between you and the tractor.

Just as motorists are entitled to operate their vehicles on

public roadways, farmers are legally allowed to operate farm equipment on these same roadways.

Tips for Farmers

Farmers have a role in road safety too. Following this safety advice will help:

- Place a slow moving vehicle reflector triangle on any machine that travels the road slower than 25 mph.
- Always point the triangle up, keep the emblem clean to maximize reflectivity, and replace the emblem when it fades, normally every 2-3 years.
- Mark the edges of tractors and machines with reflective tape and reflectors.
- Consider installing retrofit lighting on older machinery to increase visibility.
- Turn on your lights, but turn off rear spotlights when going onto the road. From a distance they can be mistaken for headlights.
- Avoid the highway during rush hours and bad weather. To increase visibility, it is best not to drive before sunrise or after sunset.
- Use pilot cars, one in front and one in back if you are going a considerable distance. Hang an orange flag out the window of these pilot vehicles.
- Consider installing mirrors on equipment to enable you to be aware of motorists around you.

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